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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4295
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000229

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO AND NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO/PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/SCHEDLBAUER/GERMAIN
NSC FOR MCDERMOTT, SHAPIRO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: ALEY

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) This is the seventh in a series of snapshots we will produce for key electoral districts ("qada") in the run-up to the June 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

2. (SBU) Aley is one of six electoral districts in the Mount Lebanon administrative area. There are five parliamentary seats in this predominantly Druze and Christian district, all of which are currently held by MPs allied with March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt. However, analysts predict that one Druze seat may be lost to Youth and Sports opposition Minister Talal Arslan, also a Druze. End summary.

ALEY: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

3. (U) The district of Aley is the only Druze majority district in Lebanon (56 percent), with Christians the most significant minority (43 percent). The city of Aley has attracted seasonal tourists since the late 1800s when the railroad that linked Beirut to Damascus was built. The railroad provided Beirutis easy means of transportation to the mountains, and this made Aley a popular destination to spend the summer months. Attractions today include an historic souk, nightclubs, antique shops and a casino.

4. (U) The distribution of Aley's five parliamentary seats is: two Druze seats, two Maronite seats, and one Greek Orthodox seat. Currently all seats are held by MPs allied with March 14 Druze leader Walid Jumblatt.

FACTORS AT PLAY
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

5. (SBU) Analysts predict March 14 will retain four seats, but may lose one seat to opposition candidate and current Minister of Youth and Sport Talal Arslan. Arslan, a Druze rival of Jumblatt, claims that he protected Jumblatt and his allies from harm during the Hizballah-led May 2008 clashes in Aley. Observers say this may lead to an "electoral understanding" between Jumblatt and Arslan; however, both say that no agreement has been made. Analysts also say that Jumblatt will have to negotiate the names of the March 14 Christian candidates with his March 14 Christian allies -- i.e., Amine Gemayle's Kataeb Party and Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces -- and will not be free to decide on those himself.

6. (SBU) Another important factor in the parliamentary elections will be the security situation in Aley. Following the May 2008 clashes, Jumblatt and Arslan are both cautious and urge their

supporters not to initiate intra-Druze violence. However, the possibility exists that at lower levels, violence could erupt between the competing factions.

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